(b) if so, the main reasons for this; and

(c) what steps the Archaeological Survey of India is taking to protect the monument?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND CULTURE (SHRI JAGMOHAN): (a) to (c) The Charminar monument of Hyderabad had developed some minor cracks in the lime plaster and stucco work on the interior and exterior surfaces of the walls due to ageing and vibrations caused by heavy vehicular traffic. The Archaeological Survey of India has taken conservation measures such as grouting, sealing and fixing the affected portions.

There is no major threat to the fabric of the monument at present.

Theft of rare antiques

752. SHRI PRASANTA CHATTERJEE:
SHRI JIBON ROY:

Will the Minister of TOURISM AND CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that CBI unearthed a huge racket involving stealing and selling of priceless antiques from the country's museums and temples;

(b) whether a well-organised syndicate of antique smugglers are behind the racket;

(c) whether any arrests have been made so far; and

(d) the steps Government propose to take for the safety and preservation of these rare antique items which date back to the first century A.D.?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND CULTURE (SHRI JAGMOHAN): (a) and (b) As per the information given by the Central Bureau of Investigation during the last three years, they have registered three cases of theft of antiquities from temples and two cases of sale of antiquities by dealers who did not have any licence from the Archaeological Survey of India.

The CBI has also recently intercepted a consignment at the Export Unit of the IGI Airport, New Delhi and recovered sixteen antiquities, and

as a follow-up to that, twelve more antiquities have been seized from the smugglers.

(c) Three persons have been arrested who are still in judicial custody.

(d) Steps have been taken by the Archaeological Survey of India in consultation with the law enforcing agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation, Customs, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and the State Government Police to check thefts of antiquities and their smuggling by stepping up vigilance and intensifying checking at the customs exit-channels as well as enforcement of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972.

Armed guards as well as private security agencies have also been deployed at select monuments/museums.

Rural tourism

†753. SHRI MOOLCHAND MEENA:
SHRIMATI SAROJ DUBEY:

Will the Minister of TOURISM AND CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have asked the State Governments to send proposals for development of rural tourism during the Tenth Five Year Plan; and

(b) if so, the number of proposals received in this regard alongwith the names of States from whom they have been received?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND CULTURE (SHRI JAGMOHAN): (a) Department of Tourism, Government of India has introduced Rural Tourism Scheme in the current financial year and has requested all the State Governments/UT Administrations to furnish one proposal for promotion of rural tourism during the current financial year.

(b) Based on the preliminary proposals received from the State Governments the Department of Tourism so far has identified the following ten Rural Tourism Projects during the year 2002-03:

1. Pochampalli (Andhra Pradesh)
2. Kokkare Bellur (Karnataka)

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.